

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2017

Ms. Marlys Osterhues
Chief, Environmental and Corridor Planning
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Ms. Osterhues:

For nearly 100 years, the Springfield Community has been working to address the problem of too many train tracks and too many street crossings in the City. The associated safety, congestion, noise, and community disruption concerns have burdened our citizens for far too long. We now have an affordable solution that enjoys broad community support and has been approved by all of the relevant state and federal agencies, as well as the affected railroads. With the help of two TIGER grants and significant state and local funds, the City has completed the first segment and the second segment is under construction.

During construction of the first segment (Carpenter Street), portions of the foundations of seven houses were discovered. Four of these houses were destroyed in 1908 during a race riot, an event which eventually led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has determined that the entire block on which these houses and outbuildings were located is eligible for the National Registry of Historic Places and should be preserved in place. Because of this determination, the project may not use any portion of the site unless there are no feasible and prudent alternatives.

The FRA identified a series of avoidance alternatives which were reviewed by the affected railroads (Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific), the Illinois Department of Transportation, and the City of Springfield. Engineers from the four entities unanimously agreed that none of the avoidance allowances are prudent since they cause unacceptable safety or operational problems. All of the avoidance alternatives would seriously compromise the railroad design standards established to protect railway workers and the public. The railroads are adamant that they cannot proceed with this project unless their design requirements are met; the City and IDOT support the railroads' position. It is therefore clear to us that no prudent avoidance alternatives exist.

At the same time, the Illinois NAACP and the Illinois Historic Preservation Office within the Illinois Department of Natural Resources have urged the FRA allow further excavation and artifact recovery at the site to maximize the educational opportunities associated with it. As the Illinois NAACP stated in an August 17, 2017 letter to you, "only through artifact recovery and exhibits can we raise the awareness in our community of this tragic event in Springfield History." Unfortunately, the FRA's insistence on avoidance prevents this from occurring.

Based on our discussions with the City and IDOT, we believe that there is an alternative that would allow the project to move forward, provides the railroads with a corridor that meets all of their requirements, and recovers artifacts for education and display, while still leaving 85 percent of this site untouched.

We strongly urge the FRA to accept that there are no prudent avoidance alternatives and to proceed with an alternative that achieves the project's purpose while minimizing impacts to the archaeological site.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Rodney Davis
Member of Congress



Darin LaHood
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator